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ABSTRACT

Ways in which college-level subject teachers might use writing as a form of learning and as a means of demonstrating learning are presented in this guide. Several assumptions about writing are made throughout this compendium: (1) writing about a subject means thinking about a subject; (2) students can only learn to write by writing; (3) more and not less writing needs to be assigned; (4) less and not more time needs to be spent by teachers on papers; and (5) student revisions of a series of short papers are more valuable than a teacher's massive revision of a single long paper. In the first section of the guide, the literacy problem, the problem as it manifests itself at Hunter College in the City University of New York, and Hunter's approach to the problem are described. In the second section, practical suggestions for dealing with writing problems are made in chapters on integrating writing and learning, assigning writing, and evaluating writing. Appended to the guide are a sample of a step-by-step approach to term paper requirements for a philosophy course at Hunter and a copy of the form used by Hunter faculty to refer students to Hunter's Writing Center. (CMG)

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Learning Through Writing

A Practical Guide to Student Writing For College Teachers

CHARLES PERSKY
ANN RAIMES

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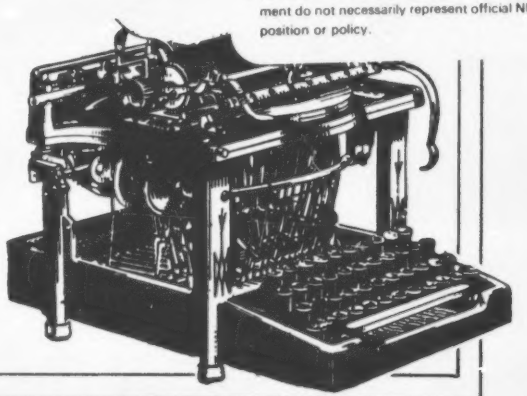

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE CENTER of the City University of New York

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Preface

College teachers today ask questions like: "What can I do about X, who can't write a literate sentence?"; "How do I deal with essays that not only miss the point but are full of grammatical errors?"; "How can I possibly assign writing when it takes so much time to grade the papers?"; "Why should I assign any writing when I need all the class time I can get for covering my subject?"

All these questions are legitimate, especially in the current context of large classes, heavy faculty course loads, and the changing student population in our universities. Many college teachers still want to use writing in their courses, but they aren't sure how to help the large number of students they now face who clearly lack basic writing experience and skills. This guide is for them. It is not a composition textbook, not a refresher course in the technical aspects of written expression, and not an exercise book for students. All those are available in vast quantities in college bookstores. Rather this pamphlet is a compendium of suggestions on how subject teachers might use writing as a form of learning and as a means of demonstrating learning without either changing their fields or totally giving up their private lives.

We have tried to be as concise and suggestive as we could, but not encyclopedic. And so we made the guide short. In only 47 pages we have surveyed the background to students' writing problems and provided a brief section on strategies for dealing with them. Utilitarians looking for immediate aid may turn directly to page 20.

In the first section of the guide we discuss the literacy problem as it appears to us at Hunter College. Rather than presenting a superficial survey of a complex university or national phenomenon, we offer a detailed description of a single case: our own. We hope that general readers will learn more from one tale well told than from many merely summarized.

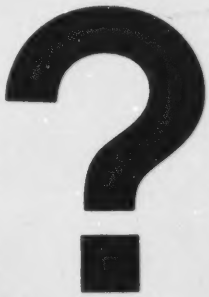
Several assumptions are implicit (and often explicit)

throughout: writing about a subject means thinking about that subject; students can only learn to write by writing; more and not less writing needs to be assigned; less and not more time needs to be spent by teachers on papers; student revisions that deal step by step with the writing problems which have appeared in a series of short papers are more valuable than a teacher's massive revision of a single long paper.

Along with these assumptions goes another crucial one for us: writing about writing is not an exact science. Much of its validity depends on the range of experience drawn upon. So this guide includes assistance from many colleagues at Hunter College. Special thanks go to the members of the Faculty Seminar on the Teaching of Writing in the Subject Areas and to the staff of the Writing Center. And we want to express our particular gratitude to Professor Gerald Pinciss, Grants Coordinator and Chairman of the NEH Executive Committee, who encouraged us, funded us, and even edited us.

Did you know that:

- The majority of colleges and universities in this country offers remedial writing programs.
- More than half of Hunter's entering freshmen regularly require remediation in English in order to reach the prescribed CUNY standard of "minimal readiness" in reading and writing for college-level work.
- The departments of English and Academic Skills offer respectively about 65 and 45 sections of courses each semester in remedial reading, writing, and English as a second language.
- 35% of CUNY students report that they are not native speakers of English.
- Approximately 31% of Hunter's entering freshmen are born outside the U.S.[1].
- Nearly half of our students work an average of seventeen hours a week.[2]
- While a British high school student may write 1,000 words a week and an American student in a middle-class high school 350 words a week, the inner city public school graduate is likely to have written only 350 words a semester.[3]



1

STUDENTS AND LITERACY

> "I only wrote one or two compositions in my three-year high school. That's why I couldn't pass my writing test in college. If I had been taught to write compositions and to correct mistakes since elementary school, I would not have failed my writing exams."
>
> *Hunter College student*

Students do not read or write as well now as they did in the past. Everywhere, declining SAT scores and the proliferation of basic competency tests point to a decline in literacy. For us at the City University, the view beyond New York is consoling, for we realize that this decline is not confined to urban areas or to institutions of higher learning with open admissions policies. The 1977 National Assessment of Educational Progress found that nearly half of the seventeen-year-olds tested could not read college freshman-level materials and less than one-third could write a focused essay. Over three-quarters of the colleges and universities in the country, faced by entering freshmen unable to write coherently, have approached the writing crisis by offering remedial composition programs. Substantial course offerings and support services, encompassing remediation, freshman composition, and advanced courses, are a much-publicized feature of the Universities of Michigan and Wisconsin. At Berkeley, 40% of the entering students are required to enroll in remedial composition even though only the top 12% of the state's high school graduates are accepted into the University of California. Ivy on the walls does not serve to keep out faulty sentence structures and jumbled paragraphs. Universities like Cornell, Harvard, and Columbia are establishing writing centers, applying for grants for composition programs and tutor-training, initiating interdisciplinary courses, and appointing composition directors and deans to light the way to literacy.

We can only surmise what the causes of the literacy crisis might be. Blame is ascribed variously to television, the demise of reading, lack of parental direction, the break-up of the family, the 60's, permissiveness, the Free Speech movement, the stranglehold of the Educational Testing Service and its standardized tests, and the methodologies (or lack of) in the schools. Rock music, drugs, linguistics and even fluoride come in for their share of the blame.[1] But whatever the causes, the effects are what we see, and they are enormous and far-reaching, extending beyond college into the business world, the "real" world of work. There employers shudder at the sight of the job application letters they receive; businesses, law firms, and government agencies are busy establishing their own writing programs and cleaning up the impenetrable jargon of their own publications. Companies move out of city centers when they can no longer find employees who can read and write. Different as their aims are, business executives, professionals, and teachers of students of all ages are beginning to agree on one thing: literacy is not what it used to be.

Knowing that we are not alone in the struggle for literacy, however, offers little consolation to us or to the students in our classes. When we look at the facts and figures, presented above on page iii, we should not be surprised that problems surface in all courses across the curriculum here at Hunter even though each semester the English department alone runs 60-70 sections of courses in remedial reading, writing, and English for bilingual students.

What we now face at our large urban university with its revised open admissions policy is not just declining nationwide literacy but also a new type of college student. Since 1970, CUNY has guaranteed every city resident with a high school diploma a place in a college, and has thus admitted

> a wider range of students than any college had probably ever admitted or thought of admitting to its campus–academic winners and losers from the best and worst high schools in the country, the children of the lettered and the illiterate, the blue-collared, the white-collared, and the unemployed, some who could barely afford the subway fare to school and a few who came in the new cars their parents had given them as a reward for staying in New York to go to college.[2]

If many of these students are new to the college teachers, then college is just as new and strange to them. Academic requirements, academic tasks, academic rituals, academia itself: the students enter a new world that demands from them unfamiliar behavior and a strange language, that of academic prose.

Some students who speak a non-standard dialect of English at home and in their ethnic neighborhood have to confront the fact that their spoken dialect–the words, idioms, sentence structure, and grammatical inflections that they, their family, and their friends regularly and systematically use–is not the "standard" or "educated" voice that is acceptable in writing. These students soon learn that the language which has served them well in their everyday life for eighteen years is not suitable when they put words on paper. Forcing themselves to write *they have* instead of *they has* is flying in the face of grandmother, parents, siblings, and friends. No wonder that a high school student, kept in detention after school to write *have done* and *have gone* one hundred times each, left a note on the blackboard for the teacher saying, "I have did the assignment and have went home." Students grapple with more than an academic task as they learn the conventions of writing for others: family, identity, history, environment, and self are all involved in the struggle for literacy. Going to college means crossing cultural as well as linguistic frontiers.

Other students with frontiers to cross are those learning spoken and written English as a second language. These young immigrants, speakers of Spanish, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Korean, Greek, Russian, Hebrew, Farsi, Tagalog and more than thirty other languages, are a vital part of the economy of the city and provide the college with a dynamic source of cultural interaction. Some of these students are "illiterate in English" only inasmuch as any of us would be illiterate in Norwegian if we suddenly emigrated and enrolled at the University of Oslo. Some, on the other hand, suffer the double burden of not having read or written to any great extent in any language, so that they are tackling learning to read and write efficiently and fluently for the first time in their second language. For both types of ESL (English as a Second Language) students, the vital ingredient is time. They need time to assimilate, digest, and learn the new

language they need for academic as well as economic success, time to try out new language structures, hypothesize from them, test the hypothesis, and then revise it or build on it, and, above all, time to make mistakes and learn from them.

The foreign language student and the dialect-speaking student are not the only ones to face problems with writing. Other students can write sentences in standard edited English but they have written only 350 words a week or even only 350 words a semester in high school.[3] They are not able to use writing to communicate thought or to find access to ideas. They have never been asked to do so before. These students, who might be vocal and articulate in class, turn out stilted, empty, clichéd, and circular writing, full of unsupported generalizations dressed up in *therefore*'s and *due to the fact that*'s. This is the kind of writing they think college demands and teachers want. It is their own abstract idea of what academic writing is. They write with no sense of purpose, personal voice, or audience. Writing is seen merely as an assignment for some tiresome teacher or other; it is rarely appreciated as a process that can help them study and learn.

The following essays show the way that some of our Hunter students write when they first come to college. Essay #1 was written by an ESL student, who was placed in a remedial course for bilingual students, English 004 (See chart on p.16). Essay #2 was written by a native speaker of English. The lack of organization, the faulty sentence structure, and some mechanical errors placed this student in an upper level remedial writing course, English 015. Essay #3 exhibited enough control over essay organization, sentence structure, and grammar for the student to be placed in the college-level required course in Expository Writing, English 120. The essay question was:

> Nothing can equal the variety and excitement that New York City offers to its residents. The pleasures of life in New York are worth all the crowding, the dirt, the noise, and the absence of the beauties of nature. Anyone who complains about being in New York should try living for six months in a small town, where nothing ever happens.
> Do you agree or disagree? Explain and illustrate your answer from your own experience, your observations of others, or your reading.

ESSAY #1

Nothing can equal the variety and excitement that New York City offers to its residents. You can see a lot of good shows in the Broadway. A lot of good actor & actress working in the Broadway. Each year many movies are produce and you can see them in the threaters. Each year there will be Oscar Award to the best movie, the best actor, the best actress. The popula singer group and songs too.

Radio City Musical Hall located at uptown of Manhattan. Their shows are really fantastic. It attracts a lot of people.

There is a lot of parades in the New York City. The parade celebrate their favorite holiday.

There is a lot of musemum you can visit them. Musemum about ancient history and modern art.

If you interest in stocks. The Stock Exchange located on the Wall Street.

You can see the biggest Christmas tree stands on the Rockerfeller Center during the Christmas.

If your favorite sport is baseball, you can see the games in the Yanyee Statium. You can see the circus and the baketball game in the Madison Square Garden.

The Broadway shows, Radio City Hall, Madison Square Garden, Central Park, Rockerfeller Center, Collney Island, and many other places are very good entertainment places.

If you want to relax and have good entertainment. I think New York is a good place.

ESSAY #2

I agree completly with what they said. There is no other place in the country like New York City. After staying in NY for a while most people learn to accept and deal with the problem of crowds, dirt, noise and crime. There are so many good things to see and explore until the problems are easily put to the back of our minds. New York probably has more nationalities, religion and cultures than any other city in the world and they are all combined and there for anyone who wishes to learn or be a part of them. I know from experience that the pleasures of living here are worth the problems. Every summer during vacation my family drives down to my parents home town in Alabama we stay for 2-3 weeks and they are the most boring 3 weeks of our summer. There are no movies or plays no disco's or parties. There is, a bowling alley but it is 5 miles away and only has six lanes. The only thing to do is watch t.v. and sit around. Another good thing I am learning about NY is that no matter how long you have lived here there is always some where new and diffrent to go. Today was my first time ever coming to Hunter College, I have lived here all my life and during my lunch break I walk up and down Lexington, Park, and Madison Ave's then I walked over to Central Park it was the first time I had ever been in this area and I just looked in the shop window and watch the people walking around and it was like a whole new diffrent world than the one I am used to and I was excited about telling my boyfriend and sisters & brother about it. The whole time I walked around I wished they were with me and that I had more time to walk all around.

ESSAY #3

I love living in New York City. So much happens here. On any day or night you can meet many different people and see interesting things. Every day is an adventure.

I recall one day when a few friends and I had lunch together. On the way back to my girlfriend's house, we were walking in a group talking when we came upon a woman dressed in rags, sitting on a garbage can. Not that this is such an unusual sight, but John, who must have been feeling like clowning around, turned to the woman and said, "Mama! Who done this to ya'?"

People turned to look, but the biggest shock was that the woman jumped up and shouted "John Brown son, John Brown."

That's the thing I like the most about this city. The people and the happenings are so unpredictable. And there are so many things to do. In my school we used to go on trips once a week to the city. Wednesday was trip day. Our teachers took us to Museums, the U.N., a couple of stock exchanges, Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty, plays, skating, sight seeing. We traveled as a group, using the trains mostly. There is so much to learn being in the city.

Now my grandmother lives in a small town in Florida, and it is absolutely dead. The big thrill of the day could be a car passing down the street. The people there ask me how I can live in the filthy, noisy city, when I could live there. Then later on they'll be sitting, staring at the grass mumbling, "There's nothing to do."

And when night falls they'll get in somebody's car and head for Miami or Fort Lauderdale looking for action. Miami and Fort Lauderdale. The City!

But even in those cities, nothing compares with the Big Apple. It's the one place where you're never at a loss for entertainment.

From these representative samples of student writing we can see how much there is to be done. Obviously, one or two courses in writing will not work miracles and provide what twelve years of education have failed to provide. In every course we teach, we have to remind ourselves who our students are, what their preparation has been, and what strengths as well as weaknesses they bring with them. As Mina Shaughnessy found out in her detailed study of 4,000 essays of City College freshmen, the majority of CUNY students

> write the way they do, not because they are slow or nonverbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes.[4]

2

WHY WRITE?

"We do not write in order to be understood, we write in order to understand."

C. Day Lewis

We do not expect any reader to be fired with enthusiasm by the student samples presented in the last chapter. The essays are perhaps as dispiriting as they are challenging. When such student writing is added to other shocks we are currently heir to—shrinking budgets, heavy teaching loads, large classes—we might decide not to ask students to write at all. Some of us have even gone so far as to adopt futurist ideology and to claim that writing is fast becoming an anachronism in our oral-computer-world community. While others are not that anxious to encounter such a glorious future, they too are nevertheless uneasy about how to maintain requirements that students seem unable to fulfill. The best intentioned surprise themselves by their readiness to question seriously the need for writing.

The Real World

Let us for a moment climb down from our ivory tower, and examine what non-academics call—with a special edge of sarcasm reserved entirely for us—the real world. Have in fact electronic machines taken over the world while we were temporarily blinded dusting our blackboards? Is there no longer any need for written communication—for writers? The answer given by those who are most knowledgeable is a flat "No."

The deputy editor of the *Economist*, Norman Macrae, in examining the relationship between literacy and industry has pointed out that "the retailing of information is the most important task in America today, and the most inefficiently performed. Crazily, the data processing revolution itself is being held up mainly by

linguistic restraints. A computer can be told what to do only by somebody who expresses to somebody else exactly what he wants." He goes on to describe the enormous costs of huge remediation programs to educational institutions, but then emphasizes that "the much bigger losses from the lack of writing skills occur in the worlds of business and of human development."[1]

To Norman Macrae's testimony we can add the remarks of three panelists who participated in the April, 1980 CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors annual conference: Thomas Conelly, Vice President of Chase Investors Management Group; Wilhemina Cottman, Coordinator of Economics and Employment, City of New York; and Walter Blass, Director of Corporate Planning New York Telephone. All stressed without exception the increased need for clear, effective written communication even in today's computerized business world, the fact that companies will not hire for managerial positions candidates who have any literacy problems, and the fact that responsibility for good writing rests with the individual; company editors are not made available to managers and executives.

Further confirmation of the need for good writing comes from a study published by the Modern Language Association of America. Linwood E. Orange states that "fifty-three law schools and thirty-seven medical schools (all fully accredited and highly reputable) located in twenty-one states, nearly four hundred industrial organizations of the blue chip variety, and forty-three governmental agencies contributed facts, figures, and comments" to his survey of the skills these various schools and employers consider necessary to success. His intent was to discover if majoring in English qualified students for "law, medicine, business, and federal service."[2] While responses varied somewhat, all gave high priority to writing. Among the requirements noted by the business and government sectors were the following: "Ability to analyze, interpret, reorganize, and rephrase material; Ability to handle paperwork with grammatical accuracy, conciseness, and clarity; Ability to prepare well-documented reports; Ability to edit or rewrite material that has been prepared by technical personnel."[3] Clearly good writing skills are a necessity for our students in the real world.

And students are not only students; they are citizens in a democracy with strong, living traditions of individual participation and movement toward social change. Both of these central aspects of our culture depend enormously on the synthesizing, analyzing, discovering and growing processes that writing most fully encourages and develops. These too are part of the real world.

Writing as Learning

Ironically, while non-academic observers are emphasizing the importance of writing, the need for students to write is being challenged inside academia itself. Oral discussion and short-answer or multiple-choice, computer-graded exams are being touted not only as much easier for the teacher but also as equal to the experience of writing about the subject matter. We believe that few are actually convinced but that many are feeling a growing readiness to accept such solutions. Before any of us do accept them, however, we must know precisely what we are doing, not only to literacy in the classroom but to learning generally. We need to examine the connections between writing and learning.

What is it that happens when we write? Here in our opinion is one of the best non-technical descriptions of the writing process:

> Composing involves exploring and mulling over a subject; planning the particular piece (with or without notes or outline); getting started; making discoveries about feelings, values, or ideas, even while in the process of writing a draft; making continuous decisions about diction, syntax and rhetoric in relation to the intended meaning and to the meaning taking shape; reviewing what has accumulated, and anticipating and rehearsing what comes next; tinkering and reformulating; stopping; contemplating the finished piece and perhaps, finally, revising. This complex, unpredictable, demanding activity is what we call the *writing process*. Engaging in it, we learn and grow. [4]

Clearly, little of the above can be duplicated by any other process. Oral discussion and multiple-choice exams simply do not involve all these steps as part of a single act of engagement with the subject matter. But can writing be shown to possess those

qualities contemporary learning theorists agree upon as central to the *learning* process itself? A teacher and researcher, Janet Emig, has attempted to show just that, and further claims that writing is unique because it alone possesses more of those qualities than any other mode of learning.

Drawing upon the work of linguists and psychologists such as Jerome S. Bruner, Jean Piaget, Lev S. Vygotsky and A. R. Luria, Emig isolates common elements among their learning theories and compares them to the elements of the writing process (see chart on p.13). Writing as a process illustrates all of them, and in the most concentrated form possible. It is "uniquely multi-representational and integrative"[5] because it combines the three basic learning steps of the theorists—doing, depicting and symbolizing—in an "inherent re-inforcing cycle involving hand, eye, and brain."[6] It provides a form of re-scanning and review in a time context unique to itself. The element of time is perhaps the distinctive factor in writing as a learning process. Unlike speaking situations which involve face-to-face communication, writing addresses an audience which is not present: "it assumes a much slower, repeated mediating process of analysis and synthesis, which makes it possible not only to develop the required thought, but even to revert to its earlier stages, thus transforming the sequential chain of connections in a simultaneous, self-reviewing structure. Written speech thus represents a new and powerful instrument of thought."[7] This process of reviewing, analyzing, synthesizing and revising, this going back to the past of what we have written, considering our revisions as a present product and anticipating the future responses of our unseen audience leads Emig to note: "Writing, in other words, connects the three major tenses of our experience to make meaning."[8]

Finally, we should recall what it *feels* like to write, and with what exhilaration and relief we become clear to ourselves. As Nancy Dean has said about the writer—"If he is honest, the struggle is hard, because as he gropes for the right word he discovers what he does not mean. As he selects the precise word, he discovers his own meaning."[9]

But....

Do our students do all those things? And if they are so deeply involved in reviewing, scanning, thinking, and revising, why is their writing so poor? Obviously, our students, or many of them, do not engage fully in their writing. A characteristic distinction between poor writers and good writers is the presence or absence of the processes described above. Whatever the reasons may be for the absence of these processes, one fact is clear: our students will never have a chance to improve if they are not provided with constant practice, with an ever-present opportunity to experience the writing process in an authentic manner. This is perhaps our central task and responsibility: students must write more, not less.

Unique Cluster of Correspondences between Certain Learning Strategies and Certain Attributes of Writing[10]

Selected Characteristics of Succesful Learning Strategies	Selected Attributes of Writing Process and Product
1. Profits from multi-representational and integrative re-inforcement	1. Represents process uniquely multi-representational and integrative
2. Seeks self-provided feedback:	2. Represents powerful instance of self-provided feedback:
a. immediate	a. provides product uniquely available for *immediate* feedback (review and re-evaluation)
b. long-term	b. provides record of evolution of thought since writing is epigenetic as process-and-product
3. Is connective:	3. Provides connections:
a. makes generative conceptual groupings, synthetic and analytic	a. establishes explicit and systematic conceptual groupings through lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical devices
b. proceeds from propositions, hypotheses, and other elegant summarizers	b. represents most available means (verbal language) for economic recording or abstract formulations
4. Is active, engaged, personal-notably, self-rhythmed	4. Is active, engaged, personal-notably, self-rhythmed

3

APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM

"If you wish to be a good writer, write."

Epictetus

With the decline in literacy and with the increasing awareness among many university teachers that their students will not only write better but learn better if they write more, various approaches to the crisis are being tried out across the country: remedial courses, advanced composition courses, support services, faculty seminars, interdisciplinary courses and writing courses in subject areas. Ohio State University, for instance, having decided on a "sink or swim" policy in 1965 when remediation became too expensive, held out until 1976, when the pressures of declining skills and declining enrollments forced them to "do something to salvage" as many students as they could.[1] They instituted placement tests, diagnostic essays, two remedial "Writing Workshop" courses, a Freshman English course, and a writing lab. Their basic composition program, talked about and written about as a model and called "one of the most innovative college writing programs in the country," looks remarkably similar to Hunter's own program, which was instituted in 1972.[2]

Hunter tries to help its underprepared students to swim rather than letting them sink in the turbulent waters of college courses. We test students when they enter, we place them in a sequence of courses designed to build up their skills to college level, we ask that all pass a course in expository writing, and beyond that we offer elective composition courses and tutorial support for writing in all subjects.

Placement at Hunter

All entering students take the CUNY Writing Assessment Test, a 50-minute essay which is independently rated by two, or in the case of disagreement by three English department instructors on a 1-6 evaluation scale. A score of four or above from two readers places approximately 50% of our non-SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge) entering freshmen in English 120, Hunter's required course in Expository Writing. In the Fall of 1979, only 2 entering freshmen out of 1,479 wrote well enough on the placement exam to be exempted from this required course. Those placed in the course show "minimal readiness" for a college-level composition course by meeting the following criteria for a rating of four:

> The writer introduces some point or idea and demonstrates an awareness that development or illustration is called for.
>
> The essay presents a discernible pattern or organization, even if there are occasional digressions.
>
> The essay demonstrates sufficient command of vocabulary to convey, without serious distortion or excessive simplification, the range of the writer's ideas.
>
> Sentences reflect a sufficient command of syntax to ensure reasonable clarity of expression. The writer generally avoids both the monotony of rudimentary syntax and the incoherence created by tangled syntax.
>
> The writer demonstrates through punctuation an understanding of the boundaries of the sentence.
>
> The writer spells the common words of the language with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Exceptions can be made for the so-called "demons" which frequently trouble even an advanced writer.
>
> The writer shows the ability to use regularly, but not necessarily faultlessly, the common forms of agreement and of grammatical inflection in standard written English.[3]

Fifty percent of the entering non-SEEK students score below 4-4; their papers are then read again for placement in courses in the Developmental English Program. Students placed into remedial courses must take the CUNY Writing Assessment Test again as a final exam and pass it with a 4-4 rating before they can enroll in 120 (see the chart on p.16).

Basic composition courses offered at Hunter

Students who show that they need help with their writing can be required to take from one semester to 1-2 years of writing courses; if they fail and repeat a course, their time spent in remediation can, of course, turn out to be longer. The chart shows the sequence of English department or SEEK courses into which students are placed:

English 120 Expository Writing

Department of English		**Department of Academic Skills (SEEK)**	
Engl. 015 Writing Workshop 2	Engl.005 English for Bilingual Students 3	Ac.Sk. 032 Developmental Writing/ESL	Ac.Sk. 021 Developmental Writing 2
Engl. 014 Writing Workshop 1	Engl. 004 English for Bilingual Students 2	Ac.Sk. 031 Developmental Writing/ESL	Ac.Sk. 020 Developmental Writing 1
	Engl. 003 English for Bilingual Students 1	Ac.Sk. 030 Developmental Writing/ESL	

Support services at Hunter

Since 1976, Hunter has offered extra-curricular help in writing to students in any course. In the Writing Center (320TH) students taking an advanced philosophy or political science course, graduate students and students preparing law school applications work alongside students battling against sentence fragments and stray *-ed* endings. They can choose to work with a tutor once a week, attend a two-hour workshop, use reference books, or just drop in with a quick question about their writing. The undergraduate and graduate students who form the Center's staff work with their peers on problems ranging from research methods, organization, generating ideas and improving sentence style to basic grammatical and proofreading skills. Some students are referred by instructors (see referral form sample in the Appendix); others come on their own initiative.

Students in the SEEK program have access to their own tutoring service in all basic skills. In addition, the Special Services Program (403HC) offers tutoring "designed primarily for students taking remedial sequences" as well as workshops on writing research papers.[4] Students whose work suffers primarily from lack of familiarity with the subject matter can receive tutorial help in all content areas through the Tutorial Services Office (407TH).

Writing across the curriculum at Hunter

In the Spring semester, 1978, the college ran a faculty seminar on writing in the subject areas. Fourteen different departments were represented by the seventeen participating faculty members. These participants devised assignments, and examined and evaluated student writing; they scrutinized the system of pre-requisites; they drew up checklists and questionnaires, wrote guidelines for their own departments, and proposed new courses. The eighteen-page report of summary and recommendations that the seminar's members produced was taken up by the Senate Committee on Proficiency in English Composition. The result was the following resolution passed by the Senate on February 6, 1980:

> **1.** Each divisional curriculum committee shall consider the ways in which writing is and can be integrated into the divisional course offerings. This consideration shall include, by the end of the Fall term 1981, an evaluation of the offerings of each department.
>
> **2.** The Undergraduate Course of Study Committee shall require that all materials submitted for its consideration contain a statement of the writing pre-requisites (other than 17.120 if any), expectations, and requirements of the course(s) involved.
>
> **3.** A College Committee on Writing, including two representatives selected by each divisional curriculum committee, at least one of whom shall be a member of that committee, shall be established to serve in an advisory capacity to the Undergraduate Course of Study Committee. The first meeting of the committee shall be convened by the Chairperson of the Undergraduate Course of Study Committee, who shall afterwards serve as an *ex-officio* member of the College Committee on Writing.

In its coordinating capacity, the College Committee on Writing shall consider forwarding to the appropriate departments and divisions recommendations regarding:

A. development of new courses which emphasize writing;
B. revision of courses in order to increase emphasis on writing;
C. recruitment and training of tutors, and the further development of support services (including the Writing Center);
D. organization and funding of seminars and workshops for faculty in the teaching of writing in the subject areas;
E. the possibility of institutional support for research related to the teaching of writing;
F. such other matters related to writing as may come before it;
G. the Committee shall review and reconsider the standards now established for the present exit examinations for 17.120.

Within individual departments at Hunter as well, writing is becoming more of an issue for discussion and innovation. Music and Communications are offering courses in writing about their own particular disciplines. The Philosophy department has drawn up an essay evaluation form and a four-page guide for students on how to write a philosophy paper. Plans are underway to base some sections of remedial courses on specific content themes and to have some sections of Expository Writing based on subject matter outside English and taught by subject area faculty volunteers. More and more, the literacy crisis is quite rightly being seen as one that no single department can remedy alone. For language is, across the curriculum, the basis of all the subjects. We use it to convey information, interpret, analyze, synthesize, question, arrange, criticize, and ultimately comprehend. All these learning activities involve language, and so the study of rhetoric, of "how words work" as I.A. Richards put it, is as necessarily cross-curricular as the formation and development of ideas.[5]

Writing across the curriculum across the country

Hunter is by no means going out on a fragile untested limb by advocating writing across the disciplines. Many schools are

spreading the responsibility with large grants for faculty development projects and for big new composition programs. The Universities of Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Iowa are now deeply committed to extensive programs in composition. Many smaller colleges, such as Beaver College and West Chester State, are building national reputations on their interdisciplinary approach to writing. In some colleges, faculty members retreat for a weekend, week or more to discuss writing as a process as well as a product; some colleges experiment with team-teaching, some with linked courses. Others set up required advanced subject-area writing courses or assign faculty members to Writing Lab duties. Professional conferences spill over with papers on new interdisciplinary projects; journals are stuffed with articles touting this or that latest way of getting all the faculty and administration involved in the enterprise. In fact, so popular are interdisciplinary studies of writing that this "latest experimental rage" has produced critics with their usual reservations, warnings, and objections.[6]

What we at Hunter advocate as the best way for us to deal with the problem of literacy might, however, be called mundane rather than trendy. One of the best approaches, after all, is that writing simply become business as usual for most of our students in most of their college courses.

4

INTEGRATING WRITING AND LEARNING

"There is no study which is not a language study, concerned with the speculative instruments it employs."

I.A. Richards

The teacher who wishes to make writing business as usual in a subject course must initially consider two essential points: 1) writing is a process as well as a product; 2) many students do not understand writing as a process or as a product intended for an audience: they do not readily see the connections between the steps of the process, the results, and the probable responses of an unseen audience. All that follows may be deduced from these two points.

For example, we cannot assign writing to today's students casually or on the basis of assumptions about "college" that are no longer true without the results being frustrating to all involved. Rather, we must carefully consider the capabilities of our own particular students in a particular class, and assess how we can use and improve these capabilities through writing assignments that serve the aims of the course. This last is vital: what is the role of writing in the course? Unless we fully clarify the function of writing in our own minds and make that function clear to our students, there is no reason to assume that the class will understand why it is being asked to write or fully involve itself in the writing process.

The writing done in a course should not be viewed as having meaning only for students; their essays may very well reveal a great deal about our own effectiveness as teachers. For example, how many poor responses might be traced back to inadequate instructions or incorrect assumptions concerning vo-

cabulary, or even previous background? What begins as an attempt to establish a dialogue between teacher and student can evolve into an examination of our central interests as subject teachers which in turn takes us back to the heart of what we want our students to learn as writers: who is our audience, what is our purpose, and how can we best achieve that purpose through communication? Writing, learning and teaching all become one, as indeed they are.

In order for writing to function as a mode of learning and teaching, the instructor must devise a sequence of assignments that enables students to learn from what they write. Teachers should seek out correspondences between what might be called the "subject process" and the "writing process." By "subject process" we mean how a subject comes into being and expresses itself. For example, literary analysis chooses a topic (the text), proposes to do something with it, decides how best to do it and what sort of evidence is admissible to support its view, chooses a method of organizing its material, and finally engages in a complex series of decisions about vocabulary, tone and form as ways of expressing its findings to its intended audience. These steps closely parallel at least the more obvious parts of the "writing process": topic, proposition, evidence, organization, diction, tone, audience; i.e., what do you want to do and how can you best do it. In sum, students need to be shown how the manner of proceeding in an essay on a particular subject closely matches the manner of proceeding used by the subject. The closer these two activities are brought together in the classroom, the more teaching the subject and teaching writing become one, and the more students experience writing as part of the subject itself, not some vile addition calculated to rob them of the credit they deserve for learning the facts and knowing their stuff.

In addition to the two processes of the subject and writing there is that at-times forgotten "process" of the student as a living being interacting with the subject, perhaps for the first time. Assignments should be graduated in order to give the student the opportunity to learn how to write in the particular subject step by step. It is hard to write well, or even grammatically in some cases, when you don't know what to say or how to say it. This is often not the result of anything other than a lack of ex-

perience in using new concepts and new vocabulary to write about a particular subject. No procedure, however, will work unless the student understands the purpose of each assignment: what is it supposed to do and for whom?

Clarifying the purpose and audience of our assignments means that our instructions, ideally, cannot be misunderstood. As the *Report of the Hunter College Faculty Seminar on the Teaching of Writing in the Subject Areas* indicates, it is best to assume nothing: "From the student's point of view, many questions often remain unanswered: Was the student writing to demonstrate understanding or to persuade someone else? To whom was the student writing—the teacher, a colleague, a friend, a relative? What should be assumed by the student—knowledge or ignorance? Beyond these questions there is the overriding problem of making sure that the vocabulary we use so casually is well understood. For example, is it really clear that the student understands the difference between such general directions as *discuss, compare* and *contrast, analyze, distinguish between,* etc.?"[1]

Of course, the clearest directions in the world are of no use if the student does not know the process by which the product may be produced. The problem with "Go build a car" is not clarity. In dealing with this problem the subject teacher becomes a teacher of writing, but not by shifting roles. By being taught the intellectual operation of the subject, its modes of analysis, classification, objectivity, and how it speaks, the student learns how to think and write in the subject. We here return to the need to discover and communicate through oral and printed example the correspondences between the "subject process" and the "writing process." Surely the student who has been given some insight into the way history or geology "thinks and speaks" and has been allowed to practice that thinking and speaking in his own writing, will finally be able to write a more authentic history or geology paper than the student who was simply asked to turn in a paper at the end of the term without previous written engagement with the subject process.

The link between subject and writing processes is also an important part of the vexed problem of form and content. If subject organization and presentation are properly stressed, a student will understand that form *is* content. The same facts can be

used by two different historians to produce two totally different views of reality. Facts about a poem are meaningless until they are shaped into a rendering of the experience provided us by the poem. Form is the raw data shaped into meaningful communication; without it there can be no subject knowledge, because ultimately "knowledge" in any subject *is* the form in which it exists: the lab report as well as the history essay.

The identity of form, content and knowledge brings us back to the function of writing, for writing is perhaps the most powerful tool we have for giving shape to our thoughts. We might even ask: can subject learning exist at its best without writing?

5

ASSIGNING WRITING

"Writing and rewriting are a constant search for what one is saying."

John Updike

Once we have decided to assign more writing so that our students will learn more about the subject, the challenge still remains: how do we do it? An answer might begin with a consideration of our own expectations. We want our students to grapple with the subject matter as they write and to learn from that intellectual confrontation with the material. We want them to learn how to address different purposes and different audiences. We want them to use standard edited English, not just because we are pedants ("What is this—a political science or an English course?") but because an ability to use standard forms and vocabulary is essential to professional development. In short, we want our students to realize that writing is more than simply showing a teacher what they know or trying to disguise what they don't know.

The way that we assign writing will influence the way our students approach it. Inexperienced writers need more than a mere assignment, such as "Discuss the Causes of the Industrial Revolution"; they need "assisted invitations" that will let them "attempt to find out just what they are trying to do and thereby how to do it."[1] Assistance from us, in the form of a series of carefully structured writing activities, is essential, and the time to begin this series of activities is at the start of the course.

The first writing sample

The first step in a course that integrates writing and learning is to get students used to the idea that we expect them to write.

A short ungraded essay assigned within the first two weeks of the semester helps us in structuring the course by providing us with information about the students, their language, and their experience. For many of the students, such a writing sample is perhaps their first communication with the instructor. They are anxious to please; at the same time they are often in the dark about what pleases us. The clearer we can be about the assignment, the better it is for the student's peace of mind and the better the finished written product. Assigning even a short writing sample brings us to consider the following seven points:

1. The place for writing
Should the assignment be done at home or in class? An at-home assignment frees class time for lecture and discussion, while an in-class sample guarantees us the students' own work, done under uniform conditions.

2. The time allowed
The first writing sample need only take 20-30 minutes of the student's time, as long as the topic is adequately restricted. Much can be learned about the writer from only one or two pages.

3. The length of the sample
Students always ask, "How much do you want?" They complain frequently that they don't know how many pages instructors expect, so they cannot plan. We should let them know what we expect (1 paragraph? 1 page? 2? 3?) but then let them know, too, that we will not be counting words, that we know some writers are more concise than others.

4. Audience and purpose
Students are often confused about whom they should be writing for. It seems to them to be the instructor, but if it is, why put in information that the instructor obviously knows: "Why do I need to paraphrase the poem? The professor has read it: she teaches it!" Leaps of logic and chasms of incoherence result in their writing as they assume that they are writing a set of notes for an all-knowing professor. Here prior class discussion on the

purpose of the assignment is useful: is it to display knowledge to the instructor, to inform a general educated reader, or to educate a reader ignorant of the field? Students are helped if we specify both purpose and audience directly in the assignment and define these in class beforehand:

> Read Giradoux' *The Madwoman of Chaillot* and then see the performance of the play. Write an essay for your classmates telling them about the differences you found between the reading and the theater experience.

5. The topic

The topic of the assignment might be based on the content of the first few lectures or discussions. It could be a summary and analysis of some of the reading for the course: "Define *myth* as we have seen it used in the first week's readings." Pieces of writing on these topics will indicate to us how well our students are assimilating lecture and text, how firm a grasp they have of essentials before we begin to build on them. A first writing assignment might also ask for personal response in the form of an opinion or a description of a prior experience with the subject. Or we might consider posing a question to which there is no one right answer but many complex ones; with a question like "Is a pithed frog alive?" students engage in dialectic and explore different points of view related to the subject.

6. The terms we use

Students are often unfamiliar with the terms used in essay questions. Explaining clearly what we mean helps students discover and say what they mean. If we ask our class to "enumerate" and we get a lot of lists when we wanted essays, who is to blame? Discussion in class, presentation of a model essay, explanation of terms during lectures can all help reinforce those terms and their application in writing. A student who frequently hears this kind of explanation in a lecture, "Let's analyze photosynthesis, that is, let's examine the process methodically by separating it into its basic parts..." will have been prepared when asked to "analyze photosynthesis" in a mid-semester examination. Similarly, class discussion can clarify that a description or an example does not function as a definition.

7. Our expectations

Explaining our terms lets students know what we expect. If there are specific points we hope to find included or omitted in an essay, we should not keep that a secret and wait for one or two of our best students to hit upon the correct format. We should let them know that we expect from them their best attempt, that we will not accept an assignment scribbled hastily and carelessly. We must tell them unequivocally that standard edited English is what we and any other readers expect to find. For this first of the written communications between us, our students must understand that we take the assignment seriously.

Assigning a short writing sample to a whole class does not necessarily entail hours of marking, correcting, and grading. In fact, it is better for this first written communication between teacher and student not to be graded and certainly not to be extensively corrected. We need only read the papers rapidly, sorting them into three piles as we do so:

a. needs help outside the course;
b. needs work within the course structure;
c. satisfactory.

We might decide to stop at this point, not return the papers, and merely make sure that those students in need of help are referred to the appropriate support service, such as the Writing Center or subject tutoring. (See p. 16 for further information.) It is also useful to record impressions of each student for further reference. If we decide to return the essays, a brief comment on each paper will then suffice, as long as that comment points out what the student has done well and what the student needs to do to improve:

> The information is accurate. The Writing Center can help you work on sentence structure problems (referral form attached). Please revise with a tutor and return to me.

> Your personal response to this work of art shows interest and enthusiasm. Now explain to the reader how the artist was able to make you feel so enthusiastic. What specifically did he do on the canvas to make you want to run out into the park?

> I was interested in what you had to say and turned the page over, but you had just stopped. I think you have some more to say on this topic, especially about the impact on society. Will you finish your remarks?

If a problem that is serious for a particular discipline shows up at this early stage, the student should be informed. In some cases, an early writing sample will alert us to a student who has not satisfied the pre-requisites for the course, or who has not completed remediation and will thus have great difficulty coping with reading the text and writing about complex subject matter. In such a case, an early writing sample makes it possible for us to advise such a student to withdraw from the course without penalty rather than face inevitable failure.

Further writing assignments

With the students in our class now aware that writing is not a fiendish "English" addition to the course but an integral part of dealing with the subject matter, we have to keep them writing throughout the rest of the semester. Here are some ways we can ask students to write without our scrutinizing every single word on the page:

LOGS AND JOURNALS

If students keep a journal, they will have the opportunity to record their observations, ask questions, isolate the difficulties that are puzzling them in the subject matter, and engage in prewriting activities for essays and term papers. Journals are informal, ungraded accounts of the students' encounter with the subject—with its readings, lectures, discussions, experiments, concepts, observations, and terminology. Professor Stinson at Michigan Technological University often has a hundred students in a section of recreation geography, but still assigns journal-keeping as it provides his students with the opportunity for independent learning without burdening him with excessive paper correction:

> One of the research tools of recreation geography is observation.... By requiring the students to keep a journal of all recreational activity which they either observe or participate in, the student begins to acquire the techniques of scientific observation.... From the standpoint of the course, the students' powers of observation increase rapidly and they develop insights into recrea-

tional behavior. At the conclusion of the course, I collect the journals and look through them. I do not grade the journals; but they must keep a journal to pass the course.[2]

Since the purpose of a journal is to discover new insights through the writing process and to explore information, ideas, and feelings, students should be urged to write freely without worrying overmuch about punctuation, spelling, and grammar. The journal is a record for the writer, and thus it is invaluable in that it provides the student with a different type of writing experience from the usual "college writing." Through a journal the student explores not just the subject matter but the writer's own relationship to that subject matter.

DOUBLE-ENTRY NOTEBOOK

When students write their journals and when they write notes from a lecture or their textbooks, they can create an opportunity for further thought and writing if they write on only the right-hand page of their notebook. The left side is reserved for their comments, questions, challenges, and doubts, whether at the time of writing or while reviewing the written material. The left-hand page is thus the place for a dialogue with the subject, a vital part of thinking about the subject.[3]

SUMMARIES AND RESPONSES

For five or ten minutes at the end of a class, we can ask students to use their double-sided notebooks to summarize the lecture they have just heard, the discussion they have just participated in, or the experiment they have just observed. They can alternatively be asked to respond to the material presented by relating it to their own experience; or they might be asked to define a key concept introduced in class. When this writing is done in class, students can exchange papers and read each other's, commenting on inclusions, omissions, and snarls of logic. If this in-class writing is too time-consuming, two or three students can be given the rotating assignment to summarize the content of each class meeting. They hand in one copy of the summary and leave the other in a reserve folder in the library for other students in the class to read. In this way, students write for their peers and

aim at being concise and clear, especially when they realize how much those summaries will be needed by students who missed a class or missed the points of a class. Purpose and audience are thus firmly established.

ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS AND TERM PAPERS

Essays and term papers are the traditional writing assignments, but we do not necessarily have to assign them in a traditional way: a one-shot attempt which is given an irrevocable grade. Instead of only one term paper, handed in at (or often after!) the end of the semester to receive its grade, we recommend assigning two or three shorter papers throughout the course of the semester, with the opportunity built in for the complete process—planning, pre-writing, drafts, revision, proofreading—and with a grade given only to the final version. With two or three papers and the chance to revise, students who are unfamiliar with the subject matter and who are having difficulties dealing with its concepts and complexitites will have time to develop an approach to the subject and to work on their problems. Many of these problems turn out not to be so much writing problems as insecurity with the subject matter. It is that which produces vague generalities, repetition, unclear sentences, and faulty development. By creating personal involvement between the writer and the subject, essay questions give us one of our best teaching tools and as such are far too valuable to be confined to testing situations. As with the first writing sample, the question we assign and the directions we give are crucial to the success of the assignment as a learning experience for the students. What can we do to help our students? Some suggestions follow.

1. Clarify our expectations

Students write with more confidence when they feel they know what is being asked. A device to clarify expectations is a set of rubrics attached to an essay question. In a Home Economics course, for example, rather than just asking the question: "How do families make decisions in relation to their clothing needs?" and hoping for the best while expecting the worst, we can spell out what we hope to find in the finished product:

Your essay should

a. be no more than 3-4 pages;
b. include a definition of family;
c. include a brief description of the varieties of family life styles and the different stages in the family life cycle;
d. explain how differences in families are reflected in the values families place on clothing;
e. enumerate the basic components of the decision-making process(but not in a list);
f. relate decisions that families make about clothing to the broader cultural, social, psychological, and economic context;
g. contain at least six paragraphs;
h. be a final version, *not* your first draft, in standard edited English.

To help students in their constant struggle to find out what we want, it is useful to show them what we want. We can read aloud or distribute a student essay that we consider an A or B essay on a topic similar to the one assigned. Then the class discusses what makes it a good response; the students can be encouraged to make an outline of the essay to see how the writer arranged the material and to test the logic of the development.

2. Set up a schedule for revision

If we expect our students not to turn in a first draft but to revise and rewrite, it follows that we must allow them the time to do that. Otherwise, when we assign a topic and expect the essay within a few weeks, many students will leave the work until the last minute and turn in what is essentially a first draft with all its fumblings. We will be reading essays that end when they have just found a beginning, that are filled with "derailed sentences" and unsupported generalizations.[4] If our students are really using writing as a learning process, then there will be false starts, inaccuracies, errors, and lapses of logic in the first drafts. And so the first version is the appropriate place for giving guidance. When *we* write, we all know about notes and drafts and proofreading and editorial help from our friends, but our students don't. They have to learn to go beyond the first draft because nobody expects a first version to be a brilliant paper. For this they need a clear time schedule for submitting drafts to us,

to tutors, or to fellow students for comments or comparison with a set of rubrics or a checklist. With a time lag creating some distance from the first draft, and with a few helpful comments for revision, the student now has another chance to examine that first version and make improvements. This process may be repeated several times. A final proofreading for spelling, punctuation, grammar and typographical errors and the paper is ready to be handed in for evaluation and grading.

Just as carefully worked-out time schedules are needed for several short assignments, a term paper is made more manageable if we break it up into parts. An unsuitable topic, a faulty outline, a draft that relies too heavily on a subjective response can then be caught and remedied before the student has invested time and energy only to come up with a D paper—and no opportunity to discover why it was a D and not a B. The Appendix includes a time schedule set up for a Philosophy term paper.

3. Devise cumulative assignments

Another way to make a term paper manageable for both students and ourselves is to give a series of cumulative assignments that will then be put together to make a long paper. Assignments can increase in complexity and in conceptual and rhetorical difficulty. Such a series might be:

a. a description of one experiment, research project, or theoretical position;
b. a description of another experiment, research project, or a theoretical position;
c. a comparison/contrast of the two;
d. an analysis of the effect of such experiments, projects, or positions on the field being studied;
e. final term paper including all of the above in an organic, integrated discussion.

All that help is necessary if our students are to write a lot. And write they must, for we not only learn how to write by writing, we also learn by writing. We learn by confronting the material and trying to say something about it, by having someone tell us what they liked and didn't like, and by writing again. All assignments, from the simplest to the most complex, must be based on that simple principle.

6

EVALUATING WRITING

"Noticing and praising whatever a student does well improves writing more than any kind or amount of correction of what he does badly."

Paul B. Diederich

Ideally, evaluating writing is an organic part of the learning of writing. The student writes; the teacher reads and comments; conferences are held; the student revises; the teacher rereads and returns each paper for more revision; enough time is allowed for all parts of the writing process to be mastered; errors are corrected without penalty in order for learning to take place; only the final drafts are graded.

Yet even this ideal situation requires qualification in view of today's student. Many standard comments have become useless or counterproductive because they assume the very writing experience our students lack. And we can no longer presume that only one term of a required freshman composition course, even with paper revision and conferences, is enough to give our students all the experience necessary. The need for constant reinforcement argues that every course must now create numerous opportunities for writing. Finally, first language and first dialect interference has brought about a new context for learning to write standard edited English, which demands new responses from both students and teachers.

But dare anyone at Hunter use the word "Ideal" except the Philosophy professor? Our large classes, heavy teaching loads, and many unprepared students have caused the word to slip from most of our vocabularies. We seem to have all the trouble we can handle just trying to hold on to the phrase "covering the

subject." It is an eminently legitimate question to ask: Where will we find the time to allow us to do all that we have to do?

The answer, in plain English, is that we do not have the time we need. Perhaps, however, we can make better use of the time we do have as subject teachers. For example:

1. Teaching written standard edited English to students who speak another language or dialect of English, such as Black English, is not the responsibility of the subject teacher beyond:
   - pointing out technical errors and referring the student to the proper support service or course;
   - explaining to the student that first language or first dialect usages are inappropriate in certain contexts;
   - stressing the *student's* responsibility to learn standard forms;
   - pointing out that problems are created by errors, such as:
     — readers are distracted and lose trust in the writer
     — judgments of the writer's intelligence are made
     — social judgments are made
     — easy rejection of the writer's argument is made possible;

2. As was described in Chapter 4—"Integrating Writing and Learning"—we can try to teach the writing process at the same time that we teach the subject process: "Let's analyze the evidence for this together on the board. And of course this is exactly what you will be doing next week when you write that class essay on evidence."

3. When writing is used as a form of learning it is probably equal to classroom experience for the student, and should be considered an essential part of a teaching load: time spent on papers should be *included* in the total time given by a subject teacher, not *added* to it. The experience of the members of the Hunter College Faculty Seminar on the Teaching of Writing in the Subject Areas suggested that less time could be spent on assessing writing than on preparing lectures for certain kinds of material, and that the writing taught the subject matter more effectively. Let us stress here that great amounts of time spent in covering the student's work with voluminous comments are usually not well spent; most students will not read them. What will they read?

On Comments

Effective comments usually serve three purposes: they tell the student what has been done correctly and well so that confidence may be gained; they make the student aware of errors and weaknesses that need correction; they inform the student about how to improve. Encyclopedic editing and extensive teacher rewrites tend not to achieve the desired results. Either the student turns away completely from a buried original or can't absorb all that is being offered, often because it tries to tell him more than he can grasp. And it is certainly not encouraging to have one's writing turned into a palimpsest. The student's sense of inadequacy is confirmed, and the teacher's revision becomes an object of angry resentment or hopeless longing. Besides, it all takes too much time.

Good comments single out several major virtues for praise ("an interesting introduction and a well-organized discussion"), identify several major flaws ("the second argument is barely supported by objective evidence and your language is in general too informal"), and suggest revision strategies ("some pertinent statistics would strengthen that second point. Reread the two essays in Smith and notice how careful he is to avoid a conversational tone").

Whenever we are tempted to overcomment or not to assign an essay because of the anticipated time lost, we should remember two crucial points about using writing as a form of learning:

1. the student, not the teacher, must spend a lot of time on the paper;

2. extensive *revisions* on the part of the student are much more effective than extensive *comments* on the part of the teacher. Every error that falls within the province of the subject teacher in even a poor paper can eventually be dealt with step by step through a series of revisions, while students who need more help with revision than the subject teacher can give should be referred to the Writing Center. This approach breaks up into acceptable stages what would otherwise be an unmanageable and demoralizing task for the student, and relieves the teacher of

marathon grading periods. Of course, the final grade on an essay should reflect what the student has learned, not the errors which had to be made in order to learn it. Only the last draft should count, or at least count the most.

Some Comments on Comments

1. Comments must be concrete and not vague or mysterious: style?;!; ?; ??; X; diction?; awk!
2. Comments on errors must be neutral:
   a. cute or exasperated remarks are insulting and warn the student not to risk the teacher's ire through error. In some way or other the writer will make sure that the next paper submitted is perfect.
   b. the student learns nothing from our wit.
3. Comments should avoid technical terms or any vocabulary probably unknown to the student: misuse of the gerund; exordium mistakenly follows peroration.
4. Comments should specifically relate to the details of the assignment and the announced expectations of the teacher:
   a. eliminate doubt about *why* the student missed the goal; why is this paper a C, a B or an A?
   b. list the points of the assignment not discussed by the student.
   c. cite the *major* errors so the student can distinguish them from the *minor* ones.
5. Comments should generate thought about the whole essay and the writing process:
   a. point out to the student that errors are often interrelated: poor organization can lead to poor paragraphs and weak or even ungrammatical expression.
   b. suggest techniques for planning, editing and revising.
   c. suggest useful texts and models.

Commenting to the Multitudes

Not all remarks need be addressed to a single student in writing. Common problems can be discussed in class, but it is important not to deal with them abstractly. For example, we might distri-

bute a "danger list" which details the kinds of errors and problems likely to be precipitated by a particular assignment (or which have already occurred in student papers). Various models can be analyzed: a classic piece of writing in the field; a good student essay; a possible outline; our own version of the assignment. It is often very useful to discuss negative models, as long as we do *not* take them from our own classes. If discussion time is short, students can gain a lot from a negative model that has been extensively annotated with explanatory notes.

Class conversations are also a good context for examining ungraded assignments. If as has been suggested in the last chapter the students have been writing summaries and responses, selected pieces can become the bases for consideration of such issues as vocabulary, definition of terms, evidence, and the manner in which the subject expresses itself. But not all ungraded writing requires a response.

No Comment

In Chapter 5-"Assigning Writing"- we noted the various purposes of ungraded writing. Notebook diaries, journals and logs allow writing to become a routine part of the course, a normal rather than exotic way of responding to the material, without burying the teacher in paper. The student can get crucial practice in cementing subject process/writing process connections and explore and experiment, all without fear.

Two conditions are necessary for the success of this kind of writing: 1) the writing must be done to the teacher's satisfaction; 2) the student's privacy must be respected. There are several ways of achieving these conditions. Students can be told that by a certain date a folder of X number of pages must be in existence. Another approach is to ask students to select pages to be turned in as evidence of a journal in progress. A variation is to ask for the writing of a particular time period, the collection dates all having been prescheduled and announced in advance.

If in the opinion of the instructor a particular class has the potential, peer evaluation or self-evaluation can also be used with ungraded, no-comment writing. The essential advantage of peer evaluation is that it changes and enlarges the reading au-

dience. The student is no longer just writing for "teacher," and can no longer dismiss criticism as mere pedantic pickiness. More positively, revisions can be tested against a real group audience and the students can learn to help each other. Ten minutes at the end of a class spent in peer evaluation of drafts can encourage further dialogue about writing between students and, more vital, the internal dialogue within the student that will then lead to revision.

Self-evaluation through correction against a model or list requires a motivated, mature student, but might also create one. This technique puts the responsibility for improvement upon the student and is probably best used as a form of preparation for a graded essay, for revision, or as a kind of self-tutoring. Its major advantage is that it reinforces the central point that writing is a form of learning and self-assertion that stems from within, not some alien practice imposed from without. This same principle can also be communicated through still another form of penalty-free; ungraded writing.

Comments Without Grades

This kind of assignment allows the student to practice and learn particular writing tasks without creating extra grading loads for the teacher. The essays can be treated separately or, more effectively, be seen as part of a graduated sequence that builds the skills required to engage with the subject in an authentic manner. They may also be viewed as building towards a longer, graded paper due later in the term.

The exercise should be narrow in focus, with the specific parts of the task fully clarified in the assignment. For example, an art question might read: 1) what is the main subject in this painting?; 2) how do you know?—give three compositional devices; 3) what is the artist's view of his subject? Comments should be directed to the specific points of the assignment. To use our art example: 1) correct; 2) your third device is actually part of the second—reconsider; 3) too general—is there a specific attitude shown?

Papers of this type can be short, require only brief comments, and yet adequately serve to sharpen the student's awareness of the subject matter through writing without penalty. Students who do not turn in these assignments should not be punished through any sort of grading system. It is much more effective to elaborate in class on the fact that this is a self-motivated learning process that mature students will take advantage of and benefit from; those who ignore it will simply get that much less feedback and preparation for the actual graded essays to come.

Fast Grading Systems

Throughout this guide we have stressed our belief that a dialogue between student and teacher is one of the most effective ways in which writing can be learned and used as a form of learning, and that the best mode for such a dialogue is a combination of teacher comment and student revision. But if because of certain conditions such as very large sections or very heavy teaching loads the choice were to be between no writing at all and assignments with a fast grading technique that did not require written comments, we would choose the latter.

There are two systems that large institutions use to place and rank students: holistic evaluation through analytic scales and primary trait scoring.[1] Each is a complex technique requiring trained graders, and each allows for the evaluation of large numbers of students. While individual instructors would hardly find these complicated procedures useful in their entirety, in a much diluted form they can suggest practical methods for grading big classes in a short amount of time.

1. Holistic evaluation through analytic scales:

a. the teacher identifies and labels essential elements of a particular writing product.

b. points are assigned to each element which reflect the possible range of achievement from poor to excellent.

c. the range of possible points earned is correlated with the actual letter grades given.

d. the teacher designs a grading chart, an abstract example of which might be:

	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Score
Ideas:	2	4	8	10	12	8
Organization:	2	4	8	10	12	5
Sentence Structure:	2	4	6	8	10	8
Style:	2	4	6	8	10	5
Mechanics:	1	3	5	7	9	7
						33= C+

e. advantages:

1) grading can be done quickly.
2) students can share the scale with the teacher and thus be clear about expectations.
3) grading becomes somewhat more objective.
4) students can help to design the scale and in certain situations can grade themselves.
5) though a no-comment system, the scale at least identifies general areas of strengths and weaknesses for the student.

f. disadvantages:

1) it is impersonal.
2) it can be imprecise in that a successful version of the assigned essay might be achieved using different "essential" elements.
3) it does not provide revision strategies.

2. Primary Trait Scoring:

a. the teacher identifies and labels one essential element of a particular writing product. For example, "position taken and defended with three elaborated examples."

b. the teacher then designs a more or less detailed scale which assigns numerical values to poor-fair-good strategies which result in the desired product. The range of points that may be earned is correlated with the actual letter grades given.

c. depending on how complete it is, a primary trait scale can take into account the rhetorical context of a particular writing task. For example, not only can the presence or absence of

our "three elaborated examples" be scored, but it is also possible to score the approaches used and their success or failure:

d. numerical values can be assigned to:
   1) position taken or not taken.
   2) position taken but not clearly stated.
   3) position taken but proper terminology not used.
   4) position taken but on wrong issue.

e. numerical values can also be assigned to:
   1) elaborated example present or not present.
   2) elaborated example present but not clear.
   3) elaborated example present, clear, but subjective.
   4) elaborated example present, clear, objective, but irrelevant.

f. advantages:
   1) once the scale is established, complex issues can be graded rapidly on a chart.
   2) the scale encourages very detailed consideration of a particular writing task. The question, possible student responses and the teacher's expectations all must be carefully analyzed.
   3) if shared with the students, the scale can provide some direction for revision.

g. disadvantages:
   1) it takes time to establish.
   2) it is impersonal.
   3) it can be overly narrow in its concerns. Other skills present or even misused are ignored.

Aspects of the grading systems described above are also useful in contexts other than the troublesome one of little time and large classes. Scales or charts can give the students some idea of the relative importance of each element of an assignment by listing the point or percentage value allotted to each part. Charts might also be used to reinforce comments because they translate strengths and weaknesses into actual points. This last is especially valuable in situations where the students are reacting to a revision sequence with carelessness because the papers don't "count." Even tentative grades tend to cure such indifference,

and draw the students' attention to our comments. And comments are the heart of evaluation.

Some Closing Comments

1. As far as possible, comments should be encouraging, positive and productive, not punitive, negative and useless.
2. Several incisive, concrete and detailed comments which praise and give directions for revision are more valuable than any number of vague remarks and symbols, a complete teacher revision or blanket comments on everything.
3. Most students will not even read much less act upon detailed comments on a paper which has already been given its *final* grade.
4. All learning takes time, requires the ability to make errors without penalty, and rests on mutual obligations agreed to by student and teacher.
5. Evaluating writing is not an exact science.

NOTES

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

[1]James Koutrelakos, *Student Profile Survey: An Initial Report* (Hunter College, 1978), p.5.

[2]Koutrelakos, p.8.

[3]Mina Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.14.

CHAPTER 1: STUDENTS AND LITERACY

[1]S. Baird and C.W. Spinks, *A Report on Trinity's Academic Writing Program* (San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University, 1979), p.1.

[2]Shaughnessy, pp.1-2.

[3]Shaughnessy, p.14.

[4]Shaughnessy, p.5.

CHAPTER 2: WHY WRITE?

[1]Norman Macrae, "How to Improve Writing Skills," in *The Teaching of Expository Writing: An Exchange of Views*, ed. James D. Koerner (New York: Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, 1977), p.31.

[2]Linwood E. Orange, *English: The Pre-Professional Major*, 2nd ed. (New York: Modern Language Association, 1973), p.2.

[3]Orange, p.16.

[4]Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell, Introduction, *Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging*, ed. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1977), p.128.

[5]Janet Emig, "Writing as a Mode of Learning," *College Composition and Communication*, 28 (May, 1977), 128.

[6]Emig, pp.124-25.

[7]A.R. Luria and F. Ia. Yudovich, *Speech and the Development of Mental Processes in the Child*, ed. Joan Simon (Baltimore: Penguin, 1971), p.118, as quoted in Emig, p.127.

[8]Emig, p.127.

[9]Nancy Dean, Preface, *In the Mind of the Writer*, (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1973), n. pag.

[10]Emig, p.128.

CHAPTER 3: APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM

[1]Jeanne Paul, "Learning Basic Writing Skills in College: An Interview," *American Educator* 4, 1 (1980), 14-15.

[2]Paul, p.14.

[3]*Evaluation Scale for Writing Assessment Test*, Freshman Skills Assessment Program, the City University of New York.

[4]*Faculty Information Handbook* (Hunter College, 1979), p.31.

[5]*The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.5.

[6]Joan Baum, "Interdisciplinary Studies: The Latest Experimental Rage," *College Composition and Communication* 26 (February 1975), 30-33.

CHAPTER 4: INTEGRATING WRITING AND LEARNING

[1]*Report of the Hunter College Faculty Seminar on the Teaching of Writing in the Subject Areas*, pp.8-9.

CHAPTER 5: ASSIGNING WRITING

[1]I. A. Richards, *Design for Escape* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), p.111.

[2]Art Young, "Teaching Writing Across the University: the Michigan Tech. Experience," a paper delivered at the College English Association Meeting, March 22-24, 1979.

[3]Ann Berthoff, *Speculative Instruments: Language in the Core* (Ford Faculty Seminars, College of Arts and Sciences, U. Mass., Boston, 1978), p.14.

[4]Mina Shaughnessy, p.10.

CHAPTER 6: EVALUATING WRITING

[1]See Charles R. Cooper, "Holistic Evaluation of Writing," and Richard Lloyd-Jones, "Primary Trait Scoring," in *Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging*, ed. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1977), pp.3-66.

APPENDIX

Term Paper Requirements for a Philosophy Course

Prof. John Lango, Hunter College

In order to make the writing of a term paper an integral part of your work for this course, the following schedule must be observed:

a) *Topic:* on Thursday, *February 23*, you are to submit a one paragraph (from ¼ to ½ page) summary of your term paper topic.

b) *Bibliography:* on Thursday, *March 9*, you are to submit a list of the main books and/or articles that you will use in the writing of your term paper. (At this time, if you wish to change your topic, you should submit a one paragraph summary of your new topic. No changes in topic should be made after this date.)

c) *Outline:* On Thursday, *March 30*, you are to submit an outline of your term paper (which should be one to two pages in length.)

d) *First draft:* On Thursday, *April 27*, you are to submit a first draft of your term paper (which should be from 8 to 12 pages, typewritten, double spaced.)

e) *Final draft:* No later than Monday, *May 22* (our last class meeting), you are to submit both the final draft of your term paper (8 to 12 pages) and the first draft with my comments. Your grade will be based only on the final draft. (However, failure to meet deadlines without adequate excuse may result in a reduction of grade.)

HUNTER COLLEGE OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

- THE WRITING CENTER -

Room 320TH
Tel: 570-5076.
Box 534

Hours:
Mon., Tues., Thurs. 9-7:30
Wed., Fri. 9-5:00

Referral form--Teacher's copy

Student's name _____ Date _____

Course name _____ No. & Section _____

Instructor _____ Box no. _____

What one or two areas listed below should the tutor concentrate on?

___ choosing words
___ forming clear sentences
___ writing paragraphs
___ planning, organizing, revising an essay
___ using sources
___ proofreading: punctuation and grammar
___ spelling

Comments:

To the Teacher:

The information you give us above will help us to structure our sessions with the student. Please note that we do not work directly on any paper in progress--unless you expressly tell us to do so; however, in order to assess the student's needs, we must have a writing sample, preferably a graded paper or exam from your course. We invite you to call or visit us at any time.

The first copy of this form is for your files.

Please give the second copy to the student to bring to the Center with his writing sample when he comes to register.

Please send the third and fourth copies to the Writing Center, Box 534.

The third copy will be sent by us to the Academic Advising Office where it will be placed in the student's academic file.

The fourth copy will be kept by us. You will be informed as to whether or not your student comes to register with the Center and how often he attends tutoring as well as be sent reports on his progress at regular intervals.

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